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Spring Seminar of the Guild of Taxidermists hosted by the Bird Group, Tring
13.03.2004

- Katrina Cook, The Natural History Museum

The Guild of Taxidermists is, excuse the pun, a body of professional and amateur practitioners as well as many simply with an interest in the craft, seeking to "...raise and maintain the...status and standing of Taxidermy..." It communicates with its members through regular newsletters etc. and meets three times a year: for the Annual Conference in the autumn, and a Northern and Southern Spring Seminar, traditionally a 'behind the scenes' museum visit.

This year, for the first time, the Southern Spring Seminar was hosted by the Bird Group, part of the Natural History Museum's Zoology Department, and provided delegates with a unique opportunity to get a glimpse of the nation's ornithological reference collection, the most comprehensive collection of avian material in the world, housed on the site of the Walter Rothschild Museum in Tring, Herts.

The bird collections are *not* open to the public and visiting researchers are admitted by appointment only and at the discretion of the curatorial staff. The event was therefore a real treat for the Guild, particularly owing to the facts that the department is only open on weekdays and does not lend itself to the supervision of a large number of people. By popular request though, a solution was reached limiting the number of delegates to 25, enabling the group to be split into two smaller parties that could be effectively supervised by the curatorial staff present. Ultimately its success relied on the goodwill of staff from across the site that gave up their time voluntarily in order to run the event, held on Saturday 13th March. Without their support the seminar could not have taken place.

Despite some protests over the restriction of numbers, only 15 of the 25 members booked (including one or two extras) turned up, though this of course made things easier from an organisational standpoint. For a membership which could easily conceal one or two taxidermy 'collectors' of spurious intention amongst the overwhelming majority whose attitude is scrupulously professional, attention to security was obviously of paramount importance and the group was thoroughly 'policed' at all times.

Delegates were received at 10.00am and served coffee and biscuits in the Conference Room, while members with specimens for accreditation brought them into the Laboratory. This is a neutral 'holding' room not subject to the strict quarantine procedures for specimens entering collections areas. The meeting was opened by Teresa Wild, director of the Walter Rothschild Zoological Museum, who gave an enlightening and highly entertaining introduction to the museum, its history, and relationship with the Zoology Department. The group was then divided into two parties and given a two hour personal tour of the egg, nest, spirit, skeletal and bird skin collections led by each of the Bird Group curators, and Rothschild Library led by librarian, Alison Harding. Lunch arrangements had been made in advance with an excellent local pub, and orders telephoned through, so no time was lost in proceeding with the afternoon's events.

The afternoon session was held in the Laboratory, where delegates were able to discuss their work, accredited by senior members of the Guild, and purchase a variety of taxidermy supplies brought in by local professional Derek Frampton.

At the Bird Group's specific request, Guild treasurer and National Museum of Scotland's taxidermist Peter Summers, along with Dave Astley, gave a demonstration of several casting and bone replacement techniques of particular relevance to the bird collections at Tring. Peter removed the bones from a wing of a Barn Owl, replacing them with an assemblage of wire wrapped with tow, then demonstrated the casting of a skull of a White-tailed Eagle while David showed an alternative casting method on another bird skull. These specialised techniques enable the preparator to maximise the potential of a particularly valued specimen, making skeletal material available that would normally remain within the study skin.

A short tea break later and the delegates were set free to enjoy the delights of the public galleries of the Walter Rothschild Zoological Museum, naturally a paradise for them as it is for all of us, and a fitting and most enjoyable climax to the day's events.

Bird Group curators are: Robert Prys-Jones, Mark Adams, Douglas Russell, Jo Cooper and Katrina Cook.



CONSERVATION NEWS
Notices, Adverts & Meetings

Meetings:

Geological Curator's Group Seminar
Planning for disaster
18-19th January 2004

GCG Seminar, including 31st AGM, and field trip: Planning for disaster.
 Hancock Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne

Contact: Steve McLean, Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle, NE2 4PT
 Tel: 0191 222 6765
 Email: s.g.mclean@ncl.ac.uk

Geological Curators' Group AGM

The 31st AGM of the GCG will be held at 16.20 on Tuesday 18th January at the Hancock Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Nominations for the post of chairman, Officers and two committee members must be made by two members of the group and submitted in writing to Giles Miller, GCG Secretary, Department of Palaeontology, the Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London, SW7 5BD by Tuesday December 28th